



Better Guidance for the Individual¹

KAORU YAMAMOTO*

"INDIVIDUAL differences" is one of the favorite concepts in American education. This seems to be the primary basis for the pleas for individualization of instruction,² and also the cornerstone of school counseling.³ While stressing the uniqueness of individuals in abstract, actual school practices have nevertheless tended to pay only a left-handed compliment to the concept by

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper by Mrs. Beverly H. Lewis of the Campus School, State University of New York at Geneseo, and Professor O. L. Davis, Jr., of the College of Education, University of Texas at Austin.

² Nelson B. Henry, editor. *Individualizing Instruction*. Sixty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; Ronald C. Doll, editor. *Individualizing Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1964; A. Harry Passow, editor. *Nurturing Individual Potential*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1964; Walter B. Waetjen, editor. *Human Variability and Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1961.

³ Donald H. Blocher. *Developmental Counseling*. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966; George E. Hill and Eleanor B. Luckey. *Guidance for Children in Elementary Schools*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969; Leona E. Tyler. *The Work of the Counselor*. Third edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.

basing their group-oriented activities upon similarities among pupils.

Of course, "uniqueness does not imply that *nothing* is shared with other individuals, only that *not everything* is common to them,"⁴ and it is readily understandable that most schooling procedures have been designed to satisfy the alleged common core of humanity with the least amount of efforts or expenses.⁵ This familiar idea of economy is flanked by an equally intelligible quest for reproducibility in human phenomena. Certainly, the argument runs, no social organi-

⁴ Abraham Kaplan. *The Conduct of Inquiry*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964. p. 117.

⁵ Communitality in basic characteristics is not antithetical to uniqueness in the combination of these characteristics. Thus, assuming that human variability is normal in distribution on most dimensions and also that only five percent of the population is sufficiently different on any single dimension from the rest to be regarded as unique, it may be shown that 10 percent can be called unique when two dimensions are taken into consideration, and 40 percent is unique if 10 dimensions are involved. The proportion rises to 99.5 percent by the time 100 dimensions are simultaneously considered. See: Roger J. Williams. *Biochemical Individuality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1956.

* Kaoru Yamamoto, Professor of Education, Pennsylvania State University, University Park

zation can be maintained on the basis of the irregular and unexpected in man.⁶ The efforts of professional educators have therefore concentrated upon making pupil actions more predictable and, hence, learners as a group more teachable.

In view of this, it comes as no surprise that many familiar institutional practices try to accommodate differences among students by curtailing the range of such variations while keeping the curriculum more or less common.⁷ Age grading, acceleration, non-promotion, and ability/achievement grouping (single or multiple stream) are obvious examples. Compensatory efforts, if successful, come to a similar end by ensuring a common minimum level of performance in those completing the program. Further, students are differentiated on the basis of summative evaluation (grade-point averages, achievement test scores, etc.) and distributed, at each successive transition point, among various occupational tracks and institutional types, to give reasonably homogeneous subgroups.

In other cases, attempts are made to provide for individual differences by offering a number of alternative combinations in learner-teacher (for example, multi-section, multi-instructor courses; team teaching; tutorials; and computer assisted instruction) or learner-curriculum (for example, electives; enrichment; self-initiated learning; modular scheduling; and nongraded) interaction.

The extent of success of any of these practices is naturally contingent upon many intra- and extra-school factors, not the least of which is our handling of time and space. The *where*, *when*, and *how long* of schooling are highly dependent upon the general so-

cial definition of these concepts,⁸ and it is not likely that the child's "learning space" (after Kurt Lewin's "life space") is allowed to expand beyond the implicit cultural limits.

This often means that the alleged availability of options gives little more than an illusory choice. A recent example is the acceptance of the pass-fail grading system by many colleges *with* an accompanying stipulation that it may not be used in students' major areas, or the push for finer discrimination *after* the adoption of satisfactory-unsatisfactory grading system. In both instances, the form is there but the spirit is no more; and, unfortunately, that is frequently the fate of these provisions to take care of variations among individuals.

This disheartening state of affairs is also observable in school counseling, which is ideally based upon *guidance*, "a point of view with regard to the individualization of the student's educational experience."⁹ The actual work of a school counselor is often undermined by his well-intended creations' turning into self-perpetuating monsters. The worthy concern about individual vocational development has given rise to some oversimplified matching operations between jobs and people, both being interpreted in static terms.¹⁰ The useful psycho-educational measurement movement has turned into a "cult of numerology,"¹¹ pigeonholing human beings and reducing them to single-dimensional existence.

Counseling on matters of academic progress has often transformed itself into an operation of social judgment and status

⁸ A somewhat related discussion of this topic is found in: Robert Sommer. *Personal Space*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969. Also see: Kaoru Yamamoto, editor. *Teaching: Essays and Readings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969.

⁹ C. Gilbert Wrenn. *The Counselor in a Changing World*. Washington, D.C.: American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1962. p. 143.

¹⁰ For an examination of various facets of vocational counseling, consult: Henry Borow, editor. *Man in a World at Work*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964.

¹¹ Pitrim Sorokin. *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences*. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956.

⁶ The relationships among the concepts of lawfulness, regularity, and frequency of events were discussed in: Kurt Lewin. "The Conflict Between Aristotelian and Galilean Modes of Thought in Contemporary Psychology." In: David S. Palermo and Lewis P. Lipsitt, editors. *Research Readings in Child Psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963. pp. 4-20.

⁷ Lee J. Cronbach. "How Can Instruction Be Adapted to Individual Differences?" In: Robert M. Gagné, editor. *Learning and Individual Differences*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1967. pp. 23-39.

ascription.¹² The counselor's functions in the (so-called) "more personal" realms of clients' life have been marred by a crisis-oriented, remedial emphasis, cause-hunting inclination, and preoccupation with technical effectiveness.¹³ Finally, the efforts of counseling personnel to enhance their professional prestige have typically resulted in more social distance, rather than less, between counselors and the rest of the school staff, notably teachers.¹⁴

Where Do We Go from Here?

The fact that a tool can be easily mishandled may not be a good reason for its immediate and total rejection. Certainly, some of the aforementioned practices can serve the purpose of individualized education with further refinements. It nevertheless appears that some changes in perspective are called for if the attainment of this goal is to be facilitated through the institution of schooling.¹⁵ It is true that a large share of the educational profession's effort has been de-

¹² Aaron V. Cicourel and John I. Kitsuse. *The Educational Decision-Makers*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963; John Hersey. *The Child Buyer*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1960.

¹³ Some relevant matters are discussed in: John D. Krumboltz, editor. *Revolution in Counseling*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966. See also: Kaoru Yamamoto. "Planning and Teaching for Behavioral Change." In: Joe L. Frost and G. Thomas Rowland, editors. *The Elementary School*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969. pp. 344-63.

¹⁴ Gerald Kushel. *Discord in Teacher-Counselor Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. See also: John W. M. Rothney. "Who Gets Counseled and For What?" In: Vernon F. Haubrich, editor. *Freedom, Bureaucracy, & Schooling*. 1971 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971. pp. 174-86.

¹⁵ While the present discussion is intentionally limited to the traditional school setting, it is obvious that accelerated "de-institutionalization" of educational functions needs to take place in coming years. Better clarification of the interrelationships among socialization, schooling, and education is in order. For some instructive analyses, see: Robert Dreeben. *On What Is Learned in School*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1968; and Alex Inkeles. "Social Structure and the Socialization of Competence." *Harvard Educational Review* 36: 265-83; Summer 1966.

voted to the task of socialization of the young, a training responsibility which the school will continue, at least to some extent, to share with other social agencies. It is also the case that new professional awareness has been surfacing in various forms, including explicit instructional objectives, performance contracting, contingency management, change agency, and accountability. No matter how much emphasis is placed on such matters, however, individualization will never be approximated without full recognition of the simple fact that custom-made education is possible only when the individual learner himself is in the center of the endeavor.

Ironically, a teacher or a counselor may be hurting his professed cause by a preoccupation with his own act of teaching or counseling. When the focus shifts from an individual's desire to learn and urge to grow to the professional's intent and skills to change the person, something crucial is lost in the educational relationship. It is not unusual that this shift is made at the price of freedom and spontaneity of the learner, to place an emphasis, whether so intended or not, on power, coercion, regimentation, manipulation, and indoctrination.¹⁶ Another undesirable by-product of naive professionalism is the relative neglect of lateral forms of education among a group of learners; that is to say, of the many ways in which contemporaries learn from each other. Granted a simple aggregation of individuals does not ensure maximum utilization of this potential of mutual education, the source has too often been mistrusted and ignored as if to say that vertical interaction with much older generations within an institutional context is the only source for the young's learning and growing.¹⁷

¹⁶ Margaret Mead. "Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective." *Anthropology: A Human Science*. Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1964. pp. 162-74.

¹⁷ Margaret Mead. *Culture and Commitment*. Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1970; Harold Taylor. *Students Without Teachers*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969; and Kaoru Yamamoto. "Healthy Students in the College Environment." *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 48: 809-16; June 1970.

For many of us, it is a bitter experience to be reminded that we are *not* to be the prima donna, and *not* to occupy the center ring. "How continuously on the watch we must be in order not to help too much, not to help to the point of interfering where we are neither wanted nor needed!"¹⁸ The responsibility for what life expects of a person is ultimately and undisputably his, and his alone. Genuine choices he must be given, and mistakes he must be allowed to make. It is he who must reach a decision, and it is he who must suffer the consequences. By trying to chart a man's course of life, and to regulate its rhythm *for* him with precision, the helping profession may in fact be working *against* him.

Human history has repeatedly shown that assimilation of a foreign culture by a people works best when it is not forced. The "greatest and most durable culture change has come about as a result not of coercion, but of being present with a cultural model which they [the people] were free to accept or reject."¹⁹ The cultural model there must be, viable and authentic, because that permits the student a glimpse of what is worth conserving in what is, and also of what is worth wanting beyond what is. The young cannot test their styles of learning and growing against adults who are not themselves currently engaged in striving for a vision of mature life.²⁰

While we worry about the utility and efficiency of our operations, while we project into the future by screening, credentialing, and placing individuals merely to fit the present social order, and while we are intent on squeezing the expanding knowledge into school curriculum, we may be "losing that teaching which is the most important one for human development: the teaching which can

only be given by the simple presence of a mature, loving person."²¹

In the days ahead, the education professionals must work far better with each other than ever before, if they are to serve as a catalyst to "the many possibilities to make our youth familiar with living and historical personalities who show what human beings can achieve as human beings."²² Better guidance for individual students is impossible so long as guides are acting individually at cross-purposes. The teacher, teacher's aide, counselor, administrator, and perhaps a new type of professional whom I would call *monitor* must work closely as a team to sustain and enhance "the many possibilities" Fromm speaks of.

The monitor is the classroom-based helper and troubleshooter who combines, to a certain extent, the group- and cognitive-oriented concerns of the teacher and the individual and affective orientation of the counselor. He is the one carefully chosen for his easy interpersonal style, high tolerance of ambiguity, and flexibility in thought and action. He is the one prepared for serving learners in such diverse capacities as a tutor, group coordinator, participant observer, confidant, roving ambassador (ombudsman), and the like. He is there in the classroom as a resident *learner's aide* and a helper of other helpers. Some mature students will readily meet the requirements, and so also will some school personnel who function better in fluid, informal settings than in more structured contexts of the traditional sort.²³ □

²¹ Erich Fromm. *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956. p. 117.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The precise nature of this new professional remains to be defined. While it is true that some teachers and counselors have, at least part of the time, successfully acted as monitors, and many are being urged to transform themselves into monitors, comparatively few can perform concurrently in this and their present positions. Better start anew with recruitment and preparation. A monitor should naturally be properly recompensed for his demanding job. Even if he were a student, this task would certainly be far more exacting than any typical assignments his working peers get. At the same time, however, a monitor must be his own man in staff relationship with other professionals. Emphatically, his loyalty is with the development of students, and *not* with school's line organization.

¹⁸ Alfred Benjamin. *The Helping Interview*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969. pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ Peter Farb. *Man's Rise to Civilization*. New York: Avon Books, 1969. p. 324.

²⁰ E. B. Castle. *The Teacher*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970; Robert J. Schaefer. *The School as a Center of Inquiry*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967; and Kaoru Yamamoto. "Guidance: Education or Therapy—or What?" *Educational Leadership* 24 (4): 306-15; January 1967.

Copyright © 1972 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.